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MEMORIAL

FROM THE

PRESBYTERY OF CUPAR-FIFE,

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD JOHN RUSSEL,

ON THE STATE OF THE PARISH SCHOOLS

OF SCOTLAND.

EDINBURGH: MYLES MACPHAIL.
11 SOUTH ST. DAVID STREET.
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MEMORIAL FROM THE PRESBYTERY OF CUPAR FIFE, TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD JOHN RUSSEL, ON THE STATE OF THE PARISH SCHOOLS OF SCOTLAND.

My Lord,

The Presbytery of Cupar, in petitioning your Lordship and the Government to increase the incomes of the Parish Schoolmasters, are induced, by many considerations, to enter briefly into the history and present condition of education in Scotland, in order, that on the one hand, the social position, and as a necessary consequence, the professional merits of the teachers may be raised, and on the other hand, the attempts of certain parties in this country to rend in twain the Established Church, at least to shear it of its strength, by wresting from it the Parish Schools, may be defeated. That the state of education in Scotland at the present moment is unsatisfactory, cannot be denied. It would be highly criminal in the Church to disguise the fact—if indeed disguise were possible—that a considerable proportion of the people, especially in the large towns and manufacturing districts, are either not educated at all, or educated very imperfectly, and the Church of Scotland has far too keen a discernment of the evils of popular ignorance, to reproach the Government for attempting to remove them. It is, on the contrary, the duty of the Government to do so, and it has, we think, the right to apply, if necessary, the most stringent remedies. The clerical founders of the Scottish Church held that the State was entitled and bound, not merely to provide a good education for every subject of the realm, but to enforce it, if necessary, without paying any undue deference to what, in these times, is styled the prerogative of the parent. No parent has a prerogative to keep his children ignorant of the duties of religion, or to make him a pest and nuisance to society. We regard, therefore, with the greatest favour, the efforts of the Government to educate the people.

But, my Lord, in considering the present state of education in Scotland, the Government must not take it for granted, that the popular ignorance, which is admitted to exist in certain districts, is to be attributed to defective, or sectarian, teaching in the Parish Schools. In our opinion, it is rather to be ascribed to the Parish Schools not having

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been sufficiently extended in these places. Had our admirable educational system been developed, as its founders intended that it should be, with the increasing resources and population of the country, we should still have been able to boast that every person in Scotland was, if not variously instructed, at least able to read his Bible. But, unfortunately, my Lord, the educational theory of the fathers of the Scottish Church, though eminently successful, as all Europe admits, to the extent in which it has been applied, has not been pushed to its proper limits; and your Lordship, we presume, will be asked to decide whether a system, which has borne such fair fruits, is to be upheld and stretched to its full proportions, or overthrown, to make room for some new Institute, in which the Law and the Prophets shall be superseded by the Nebular Hypothesis and the Vestiges of Creation!

We are fully aware, that the question which presents itself to your Lordship, as a practical statesman, is, how may that popular ignorance, or that imperfect education, which is on all hands admitted to exist, no matter how it may have arisen, be most effectually removed? Now, my Lord, we humbly think, that whatever other agencies Government may employ, our Parish Schools—forming as they do one of the most ancient and celebrated of our national institutions—ought to be made the main instrument of this reformation. It is a general rule of British legislation—a rule which has added greatly to the stability of our constitution, and the glory of our statesmen—that it is better to improve than overturn. A wise legislator knows, that an institution, which is, even in some essential points, defective, becomes, in the lapse of ages, identified with the habits and feelings of the people, and connected in various ways with other institutions, and that in subverting it, and introducing an entirely new, and perhaps originally a better system, the collateral evils of the change more than counterbalance, for a long period at least, the direct benefits. Now, if this principle applies to such institutions as these, it applies still more forcibly to the Parish Schools of Scotland, which are not only very ancient, very highly prized by the community, not defective on any essential points, but which may easily be improved to meet the wants of the country. But while we are thus of opinion, that the Government ought to make the Parish Schools the chief instrument for educating the people of Scotland, other views may be urged upon your Lordship, and there are three courses, in regard to these schools, which the Government may pursue.

I. You may dissolve the connection, which has subsisted, for so long a period, between them and the Established Church, and by placing them upon a wider basis, secular or otherwise, expect to render them more efficient; or, II. You may allow them to remain as they are at present; or, III. While retaining them on their present basis, you may introduce into them such improvements as the progress of society has rendered necessary.

Now, the first of these courses, though that recommended by certain small cyclopœdists, who desire to propagate a paltry materialism, and by some of the leaders of the Free Secession, who seek to inflict a wound

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upon the Establishment, is not the one, we trust, which a wise constitutional minister will, on reflection, be disposed to adopt. For one thing, the Church holds that the Parish Schools form part of our ecclesiastical constitution. The connection between the two is not accidental—not a mere historical coincidence—not a thing that may be preserved or violated without affecting in the least degree our Presbyterian polity. The Parish Schools were originally planned and erected by the Church; they have always been, since the time of Knox, in connection with the Church; and they were regarded by the fathers of the Scottish Reformation, and have ever been regarded by all writers on Church polity, as the ground-work and pillars of our ecclesiastical constitution. Now, if these positions be tenable, your Lordship cannot feel surprised, that we should consider any proposal to change the basis of these schools, as an attempt to divide, and dismember, the Established Church.

At the time of the Reformation, when it became necessary to settle the future ecclesiastical constitution of Scotland, the Presbyterian Divines proposed that the rich patrimony of the ancient Church should be applied, partly in supporting the poor, but principally in maintaining Churches and schools. They advised that schools and colleges should be established, on a magnificent scale, but always as a part of the National Church. That they looked upon the alliance between the Church and the school as a necessary part of their plan; that they regarded, the one as the basis, the other as the superstructure, is evident, not merely from the Books of Discipline, in which the Presbyterian polity is delineated, but from the writings and sermons of the leading men of the time. Their doctrine was, that as plants, in the natural world, cannot assume their rich hues and graceful forms when secluded from the light, so neither can the Christian graces burst into full beauty, or expand into their just proportions, in a dark and uninformed mind, and, therefore, that the school was necessary, to use their own expression, as a "nursery to the Church." But unfortunately the Barons of Scotland, from motives not very difficult to divine, refused to coincide in these enlightened sentiments. They would not admit, even in theory, that every Church in the kingdom should have a school attached to it; they ridiculed the scheme as Utopian, and but for the self-relying character of the people, and the zeal and perseverance of the clergy, the parish schools would never have been founded. But the clerical leaders of the Scottish Reformation were men of too much resolution to be easily turned aside from their purpose, and, therefore, for a period of nearly sixty years, they carried out their educational theory without the aid of Parliament. The Parliament, indeed, in the year 1567, agreed to re-constitute the schools and colleges then in existence, and place them under the jurisdiction of the Church; but they refused to make the additional endowments that were required to fill up the noble outline sketched by the Reformers. In these circumstances nothing was left to the Church but to execute in the meantime her own design, and so vigorous and discreet were her efforts, that in the beginning of the 17th century, she had succeeded to a very remarkable extent, for if schools were not erected in every pa-

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rish they were in all the more important ones, and in a large majority of the whole number. These efforts, however, on the part of the clergy to educate the people, were interrupted by the overthrow of the Presbyterian form of Church government, and although from a desire to impart strength and splendour to the new Episcopal Church, acts were passed to extend and improve the Parish Schools, they were never carried fairly into effect, for the times were stormy and unfavourable. When therefore Presbytery was restored, one of the first Acts of the General Assembly of 1638, was to re-assert that fundamental article of our ecclesiastical polity, that wherever there is a Church there ought to be a School. In that famous Assembly, and in subsequent Assemblies, measures were adopted for having a school erected in every parish, and these measures were prosecuted until, in the year 1646, the Church wrung from the Parliament that act, which established the Parish Schools on their present basis. It is no doubt true, that at the Revolution, and in more recent times, acts were passed affecting the Parish Schools; but the changes thus introduced were only a fuller development, or a modification of the law of 1646.

How in the face of these historical facts it should have been stated in Parliament, and by no less an authority than Mr. Macaulay, that the Parish Schools of Scotland were founded by Fletcher of Saltoun, we are at a loss to conceive. Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun was born in the year 1653, but the Parish Schools of Scotland were fully planned, and partially in operation, a hundred years before. Whatever services, then, that ardent patriot and accomplished orator rendered to his country, whatever part he may have performed in adjusting the national affairs at the Revolution, and undoubtedly he performed an important and brilliant one, he certainly is not entitled to the honour of having founded our parochial system of education. We claim that honour, my Lord, for the Church. By her the Parish Schools were established and organized—by her they were forced, upon a reluctant parliament, as an essential part of her economy. Any proposal then to place them upon a new basis, we are bound to censure, not only as an act of historical ingratitude, but as an attempt to mutilate the Church of Scotland.

But such an interference would not only mutilate the Church, it would destroy her *prestige*. Your Lordship, as an Englishman, will acknowledge that the fame of the Church of Scotland, in other countries, is founded in no small degree upon her educational system. To spoil her of her Parish Schools, then, is not only to impair her strength, but to mar her beauty. Besides, my Lord, would it be fair or consistent to strip the Church of Scotland of her schools, at the very moment, that the Church of England, with the aid and encouragement of the State, is surrounding herself with similar institutions, the want of which, she is now aware, has affected both her influence, and her efficiency ?

But were our Parish Schools disestablished to-morrow, what would your Lordship put in their place? To establish them anew on an entirely secular basis, would satisfy, we imagine, no respectable Dissenting body in Scotland, and very few isolated individuals possessing any amount of public consideration. There can be no doubt whatever, that the immense majority, of all sects and persuasions in this country, would

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denounce any attempt to banish religion from our public seminaries. The argument of those, who would prohibit the schoolmaster from teaching the Bible, is, that the various ministers of religion may visit the schools at stated periods, and communicate sacred instruction to the children connected with their respective congregations. Such an arrangement may be practicable in England and Ireland, where there are often more than one clergyman in a parish, the rector and his curate, but is perfectly impracticable in Scotland. No minister of religion, in this country, could undertake to instruct the young in the elementary truths of Christianity, in the week-day schools. He possesses neither the requisite leisure nor physical strength. It must be remembered, that the service of the Presbyterian Church throws, as the lamented Dr. Arnold has very justly observed, far more work upon the officiating minister than is done by the service of the Church of England. In the former the whole beauty, point, and solemnity of the service depend, perhaps unwisely, on the officiating clergyman. Besides there is a popular feeling against the repreaching of sermons and the use of a manuscript in the pulpit—and all these things, combined with a system of regular domiciliary visits, impose such an amount of labour upon the Scottish clergy, that they could never undertake the religious education of the young in week-day schools. If, indeed, they undertook such a task, they never would accomplish it—not certainly from want of will, but from want of power. Your Lordship then must perceive, that to place the Parish Schools of Scotland on a purely secular basis is tantamount to placing them on a non-religious one, for religion would be as effectually banished from them as if it were prohibited by statute. Such a result none would be more ready than your Lordship to deplore.

We feel it perfectly unnecessary to dilate to your Lordship upon the importance of religion as an element in education. As that explanation of the planetary system which made no mention of the sun would scarcely be thought satisfactory, so neither can that system of national education be deemed otherwise than essentially defective, which withholds the knowledge of that divine faith, which alone can purify and embellish our immortal nature, and unfold the true basis of our domestic and civil duties. To place the Parish Schools, then, on a purely secular foundation, would be an arrangement not more unacceptable than pernicious.

But if the constitution of the Schools is still to be religious, how is it to be shaped? If the Parish Schools are thrown open to some sects, they must be thrown open to all. And of all the schemes which the perverse ingenuity of man could devise, to engender, feed, and exasperate religious animosities and contests, in a parish, that would be the most successful. Every vacancy in the office of a Schoolmaster would sound like a war-trumpet in the parish, summoning rival sects to marshall their forces, and the issue, while it gave a triumph to one, would inflict mortification and defeat upon the other; and how all this would advance the harmony of society, and the usefulness of the school, we are at a loss to imagine. But it is unnecessary to dwell upon this point, because it is impossible that any statesman, and especially a

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statesman of your Lordship's sagacity, could countenance such a project. For all these reasons, then, we hesitate not to say, that the first of the three specified courses of dealing with the Parish Schools, ought not, and we trust, will not be adopted.

II. But if the first of these courses be objectionable, so is the second. There are a variety of important reasons why the Parish Schools should not be allowed to remain in their present condition. First of all, the teachers neither occupy that social position, nor possess that succour, to which men of their education and important public services are entitled. In feelings and education, they are gentlemen, while their income, in a majority of cases, does not exceed that of a skilled mechanic. They are generally men who have been trained at a University—they are, in many cases, not only respectable, but deep and elegant scholars—they teach every thing from the differential calculus down to the letters of the alphabet, and for all this, the highest salary allowed by law, is L.34 in the year; and it is often a matter of great difficulty to raise a similar sum by fees. The Parish Schoolmasters, then, for the splendid services which they have rendered to the public —services by which the character of Scotchmen has been raised, and the resources of the country wonderfully developed—have been rewarded only by panegyric. The service has been praised, and the servant neglected. Now, we humbly conceive, that the Government ought to adopt some plan, more practicable than any that has yet been devised, for elevating the position of these men.

But a change is also necessary, to secure retiring allowances for aged, or infirm teachers. The profession of a teacher requires, that the body should be vigorous as well as the mind. In this respect, it differs in some degree from that of a clergyman; for a clergyman may preach with great, nay, with increased effect, when his hair is silvered, and his venerable arm and speech slightly shaken. But the infirmities of age very much impair the efficiency of a teacher. After he advances beyond a certain period of life his usefulness is gone, and he remains as the law is at present, a very serious encumbrance on the parish. If he still attempt to perform the duties of his office, they are performed unsatisfactorily; and if he retires from active service, he retains his salary, and, therefore, there is nothing left (for the fees are necessarily low) to tempt an assistant; should it even happen that the person who accepts this precarious office is well qualified, he is always looking around him for a better situation. But the probability is, that he is not sufficiently qualified, and it is easy to conceive how such a state of things, continuing for ten, or twenty, or even thirty years, must detract very much from the value of the school, and inflict a serious injury upon the parish. Indeed, the want of a retiring allowance for aged or infirm teachers, is one of the main defects of the present system, and one to which we beg to direct the special attention of her Majesty's Government.

But the progress of society renders it further necessary, that the Parish Schools, if they would fulfil the conditions of a perfect system of National Education, should be made a little more complex than they

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are at present, in our larger parishes. One schoolmaster teaching in one apartment, every branch of education, may do well enough in a small rural parish, where there is not much diversity in the social position of the children, or in the kind of education they require, but whenever the parish contains a town, with two or three thousand inhabitants, the school should possess the rank of an academy. By this arrangement, the master would have one paid assistant, or more, as the case might demand, and the business of teaching be properly subdivided. Some development of this kind is necessary to make the Parish Schools equal to the wants of modern society, and although it may have, at first sight, an air of expense about it, still, we believe, that a very inconsiderable sum, considering the importance of the object, perhaps L.10,000 or L.15,000 a-year, would enable your Lordship to carry this magnificent improvement into effect.

These are so many reasons for Government not allowing the Schools to remain in their present condition. We know, that other reasons for interfering with them have been urged—and urged in a more hostile spirit. It has been stated, both in and out of Parliament, that the Parish Schools have become sectarian, and, consequently, that their usefulness has been very much impaired. But by whom has this charge been advanced? It has been advanced, in the first instance, by some of the leaders of the Free Secession, but only by some; for Mr. Guthrie, one of the most distinguished members of that body, has publicly declared, that the charge is unfounded and worthless. And we firmly believe that the people connected with the late Secession would never have discovered the sectarianism of the Parish Schools, had they not been told of it by their chiefs. But how comes it, my Lord, that these men now accuse the Parish Schools of sectarianism, seeing that they were the warm panegyrists of these Schools only a few years ago. They then avowed, in their writings, that the Parish Schools were the glory and bulwark of Scotland—the main source of the national intelligence and morality; and that the loss of them would prove fatal to the Established Church. The more youthful members, both in the Church, and in that Dissenting body, who were brought up at the feet of the late Dr. Welsh—a name never to be mentioned without honour—will remember his eloquent, nay, his enthusiastic observations on this point, and how both his style and his manner grew warm as he approached it. Why, then, has the tone of the Seceders changed? The constitution of the Parish Schools has not been altered since the period to which we refer—no important or perceptible change has taken place as to the persons holding the office of Schoolmaster; the teaching in the Schools has been improved, rather than otherwise. Whence then this attack upon them. We can only regard it, my Lord, as part of a keen, but not very scrupulous crusade against the National Church.

It may sound a little paradoxical, but we believe it to be profoundly true, that the ire of the leaders of the Free Secession is kindled against the Parish Schools, not because they are, but because they are not, sectarian. Had they been sectarian, the maxim would have been, Let them alone. For as their value, their popularity, and their usefulness

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would not have been so great, they would have imparted less strength and fame to the Church, and, therefore, have less provoked the indignation of the Seceders. The Greek clown ostracised Aristides, because he could not bear to hear him always called The Just; and the same feeling has instigated this impeachment, which is all the more hearty, because, at present, Aristides is giving the moral support of his character to the opposite party.

The charge of sectarianism has also been advanced against the Parish Schools by a few isolated individuals, on the outlook for theoretical grievances, but not by the people of Scotland generally. If these Schools were felt to be sectarian, by the community, would the children, belonging to all sects and persuasions, be sent to them, often in preference to the schools connected with their own denominations. It is no uncommon circumstance in Scotland, so far as our own observation goes it is the rule rather than the exception, in those places, in which there is a Dissenting as well as the Parish School, for the children of Dissenters to attend the latter, and the children of Churchmen the former, without regard to any thing but the merits and qualifications of the respective teachers. And this is explained by two circumstances. In the first place, the religion taught in the Parish Schools is the same as that taught in all the Dissenting Schools in Scotland. They all teach the same catechism, and the same system of doctrines, and, what assimilates them much more to each other, they use, in regard to education generally, the same elementary books. In the second place, it is the interest of the Parish Teacher to conciliate the Dissenters—to act otherwise would injure his School; he has, therefore, no inducement, but the reverse, ever to allude to sectarian topics. Indeed, my Lord, every candid person, sufficiently acquainted with the country, will acknowledge, that the Parish Schools are the least sectarian of any in Scotland.

Another ground of interference—most unworthily broached,—is the defective literature of the Schoolmasters. They do not teach phrenology, mesmerism, *clairvoyance*, the new Chamberian cosmogony, and other sciences, of the same useful and entertaining class, and, therefore, the system which they represent is said to have become effete. My Lord, were the charge, that the scholarship of the teachers is defective, just, need the fact surprise us, when we consider the manner in which their learning has been rewarded. But the charge is most unjust. Never, we believe, in the history of Scotland, were the Parish Schoolmasters so well and variously qualified. That there may be exceptions to this rule is, of course, admitted, but the number is small, and daily decreasing; for the greatest possible care has, of late years, been taken, to select none but thoroughly educated and experienced men for the office. Besides the art of teaching is now far more carefully cultivated than it was formerly, while new and admirable facilities for acquiring it have been provided. To apply the word effete, then, to the Parish Schools, or, indeed, to any system, which can so easily be stretched and developed, to meet the new wants of society, is absurd. The Parish Schools are no more effete than the British constitution is effete.

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The thing they mainly require is, that the Schoolmaster should be better paid, and thus be enabled to hold up his head among the other learned professions.

III. We trust, my Lord, that we have now shown, that it is the duty of the Government, neither on the one hand to wrest the Schools from the Church, and establish them on a purely secular basis, nor on the other, to permit them to continue in their present state, and, therefore, that the last of the three courses, which we said were open to Government, is the one that ought to be adopted. To preserve the Parish Schools on their present basis, and improve them, in the way we have recommended, would rank among the brightest services which your Lordship has rendered to your country. It is so far satisfactory to us, to see that the regulations of the Committee of Council are framed with this intention, but their object is completely frustrated by the impracticable conditions with which they are clogged. The objections to which these regulations are liable, have been clearly and temperately stated, by the Schoolmasters themselves, in their Remonstrance, and, therefore, it is unnecessary to repeat them in detail. But the mere fact, of all the Parish Schoolmasters, without, we believe, one solitary exception, pronouncing the Government plan, however well-intended, to be inapplicable and futile, should convince your Lordship that it ought to be modified. And if, in doing so, your Lordship would examine the question for yourself, and rely upon your own judgment and personal enquiries, it would afford great satisfaction to the Schoolmasters and the Church.

It is clear, my Lord, that if the principle on which the Minutes of Council are founded, is not to be altered, the income and position of the Parish Teachers cannot be improved unless their present salary is regarded as a subscription. And why should it not be so taken? The main objection is, that if this were done, the Government would be bound to aid every endowed school in the Empire. But with all deference, my Lord, that would depend very much on whether the School was endowed adequately or inadequately, for if the School was not properly endowed, it would have as strong a claim upon Government as any other. It does not seem to be a sound argument against the endowment of a School by Government, that the duty has been partially performed already by the piety of some private individual. But, my Lord, were it even otherwise, there is a broad distinction between Schools privately endowed, and the Parochial Schools of Scotland. The former are voluntary bequests, their constitution may be faulty, and they may be necessary or not, in the places in which they are established; but the latter form a National system; they are under proper control, and are supported by a local and compulsory assessment. The cases, therefore, are not parallel. In these circumstances, it appears to us that this assessment, nine-tenths of which is raised by Churchmen, is as much entitled to be regarded as a local subscription for the Parish School, as are the sums raised by the Church of England and by Dissenters for their Schools. It is not only a subscription, but a large subscription. If we take the interest of the money expended

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upon buildings, and the salary of the teacher together, they will amount, on an average, to L.60 a-year, and it is only after the Scottish Parishes have raised this large sum, that they are placed on a level with Parishes in England, which have raised not one single farthing. The former must raise, in addition to this sum, as much as the latter raise altogether, before they can make the same claim upon the National Exchequer. It is scarcely reasonable, however, to suppose, that the landed proprietors of Scotland, who are already assessed for education, will subscribe as liberally as the English proprietors, who are burdened with no such assessment. The entire arrangement, then, is evidently neither just towards Scotland, nor fair towards the Parish Schools; and, therefore, we trust that your Lordship will reconsider the whole question, and recognise the propriety of these recommendations, which we have ventured to offer.

We have only to say further, my Lord, that if the Minutes of Council are not modified, they will inflict, indeed they are now inflicting, very serious injury on the Parish Schools. While not giving any support to these Schools, they are supporting rival institutions.

We have trespassed at great length upon your Lordship's attention. But the subject of popular education is of unusual interest at the present moment. Scotland is the only part of the empire that has long been able to boast of a National system; and, related as we are to that system, we have felt it to be our duty, at this juncture, to submit to your Lordship the measures which we think necessary for preserving and improving it.

12*th May* 1848.

WILLIAM MACPHAIL, PRINTER, 2 GREENSIDE PLACE, EDINBURGH.

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